

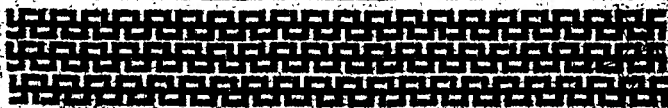


The Prairie Altar

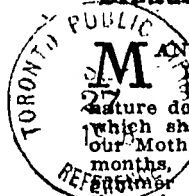
BY SARA NEWMAN

"To trace in Nature's most minute design,
The signature and stamp of power divine."

—Cowper.



Dedicated to the Women of the Canadian Prairie.



ANY of our women of the Canadian Prairies have passed through the Eastern provinces, on their way to their new homes in the West, at a time when nature does not present the beauties of verdure and flora of which she in due season, can justly boast and for which our Mother Isle is renowned as well. Even in the brighter months, when our land is clothed in its most gorgeous garments or autumnal garb, the new-comers are rushed through the country in crowded cars, sometimes too ill, often too weary from the long and tedious ocean voyage, or from constant and anxious care of little ones, to appreciate the rapidly fleeting scenery. When they reach the prairies their hearts sink as they stand and gaze upon what appears to them, at first sight, treeless waste. They feel stranded and isolated, for upon looking back, their most vivid impressions of the dividing line between themselves and "Home" is boundless ocean, bleak or blazing docks, hot railway stations—sometimes acceptably so—and crowded trains, clean at the starting point but gradually becoming more and more unwholesome as day succeeds day. Perhaps the only fond memory they retain of the entire trip is the kind and sisterly attention of the genial matrons of our railway stations or those of the pleasant deaconesses of some organization.

How they long for the friendly trees, the comforting rose bush, the clear running brook! How many months of torture they endure until the charm of the prairie warily creeps over them. How often, however, the persistent memory of scenes more dear across the water refuses to be dethroned and finally the heart-broken possessor of it packs her belongings and flees the country; but even before her good ship has anchored on the other side, she begins to feel more kindly towards our sunny plains and later amid the shady bowers she dreams—yes fondly—of the vast smiling prairie and caressingly cheering skies, which offer health, prosperity and happiness to the contented soul. More satisfied she returns and more satisfied she remains.

But the grandeur, majesty or sublimity of the prairie alone is not conducive to that life of contentment and joy which is man's lot on earth. We can live very near to God and experience much of Heavenly bliss amid the gorgeous settings of the prairie, but the Creator makes the human heart crave the human heart and wills that we find our daily joys in intercourse with and service for our kind. So while we would plead with the men and women of our great grain lands to seek to trace the touch of the Divine Master-Painter in the fields around them, we would, the more fervently, plead for comradeship and would emphasize our duty, as neighbors—in both the narrow and nobler sense of the word—to spread the human rays of cheer and encouragement to these, our brave sisters—the Women of the Prairie.

The Prairie Altar

- Q. Wanderer, afar on the prairie,
Tell me, as oftime you gaze,
What speaks to you yon fair landscape?
I'd tune my harp to your lays.
- Q. "What do I see in the prairie?
Nothing but stretches of land,
Meeting the sky all around it,
Lonely as East's desert sand."
- Q. Comrade, my lyre seeks no music
For verses of bitter strain:
No part of God's universe surely
But thought finds a nobler vein.
- Q. Harvester, toiling and reaping,
Linger one moment, I pray;
Tell me what message the prairie
Whispers to you day by day.
- Q. "What do I glean from the prairie?
Ah, sir, within Heaven's gate,
Sowing and reaping and waiting,
I've wandered early and late.

¶ Touch of the God-hand so perfect
In soul-stirring scenes which lie,
Now, in the sky-bound great grain-land,
Now, in the prairie-bound sky.

¶ Precepts God breathes through the fallow,
For some lands remain unsown,
Broad acres for seasons must idle,
Till, resting, they've sturdier grown.

¶ So 'the Great Gardener, in wisdom,
Fallows us, many a one,
Bidding us rest and grow stronger,
That His will in us be done.

¶ Then when the grain is still verdant
And shadows pass lightly o'er,
The waves come in, gently rolling;
Where's artist could thrill me more?

¶ Symbol of youth, pure and lithesome,
Maturing 'neath showers rare,
Quickened by zephyrs refining,
Exultant and free from care.

* * * * *

¶ Look out on the fields all ripening,
Beneath sun's glistening rays,
What Heavenly grandeur more dazzling
Than yon saffron-glinting maze!

¶ Glitt'ring gems. Beyond we're awaiting,
Yet our earthly gifts disdain:
What radiancy of glory greater,
Than sunset o'er golden grain!

¶ Does our ripening-time illumine
Man's path by its cheerfulness?
Do our lives, like burning mirrors,
Reflect Divine loveliness?

¶ When our harvest-day steals o'er us,
And we're garnered to the fold,
Will God find us worn and shrunken,
Or radiant like burnished gold?

¶ Gleaming, perchance, like grain's arrows,
Gilt-edged in their sheaths of gold;
Quivering shafts of truth and love
May our lowly lives unfold.

* * * * *

- ¶ Kind herald of Kingly splendour,
My Prairie, my earthly love!
This tribute I'd lay on thine altar;
'Twill reach His temple above:
- ¶ Vast-rolling emerald-waved ocean,
Far-reaching golden-crowned sea,
Gently, thy crests in their motion
Float divine rapture to me.
- ¶ Marvellous, when heaven's night-lanterns
Shed o'er thee their silvery light;
Matchless, when winter's soft blanket
Drapes thee in warm snowy white.
- ¶ Canopied prairie still rest thee
'Neath sky-domes soft rainbow-hued;
While sun-rift fleece clouds play o'er thee
In gleams and shadows subdued.
- ¶ Soft, let us voice loving kindness,
Louder the anthems swell,
Till vaults above ring and tremble,
While earth of His glories tell!
- ¶ Creator of glorious prairie,
Creator of rapturous sky,
Creator of mortals; let all things
Lift praises to God Most High!